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NOTES UPON THE DATE AND RELIGIOUS VALUE
OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

THE wisdom literature of the Old Testament—Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes—presents to the biblical student many features both of interest and perplexity. Proverbs alone is sufficient to show that these three books are the outcome of a class of authors, who, in spite of individual differences, shared certain common characteristics that marked off their writings from those of Prophet, Psalmist, or Lawgiver. But the value of the wisdom literature when regarded as an element in the history of the Jewish Religion, would be considerably increased if we could be sure of the dates when its chief productions were compiled. Of Ecclesiastes we know at least that it could not have been written till far on in the history of the Second Temple. Outside the limits of the Canon we also possess a large and important monument of Hebrew wisdom (the book of Sirach), the date of which can be fixed with tolerable accuracy and precision. But when the great poem of Job was composed is even now uncertain, and what is yet more unfortunate, in regard to the Proverbs themselves, the earliest, most comprehensive, and in many respects most instructive of the wisdom books, it is still disputed whether they are to be used as evidence for the religion of the First Temple or of the Second.

It is clear that those who accept either the pre- or post-exilic origin of Proverbs can draw from them many an important illustration in their general picture of Israel's morality and religious faith. Thus from the pre-exilic point of view one can discuss how far the teaching of "the Wise" may have aided the triumph of the higher prophetic doctrine, or again one can use the undoubted monotheism of the Proverbs to refute those who would deny the appearance of such a conception before the destruction of the Jewish State. If the post-exilic date is assumed, one can point out how the supposed peculiar aridity and eudæmonism of the latter Judaism already showed themselves in the gnomes of the Sages, or how the universalist tendencies of the greater Prophets had engendered a religious humanism, which, stimulated by the influence of Hellenic culture, was only swept away by the ill-timed violence of Antiochus Epiphanes.

The pre-exilic origin of Proverbs (with the exception of chapters xxx. and xxxi.) is still, I believe, adhered to by the majority of scholars. It has been defended in Holland by Hooykas and Kuenen, in Germany by Delitzsch and Nowack, in England by Davidson and Cheyne. On the other side there stand the Nestor of biblical criticism, Edward Reuss, and the great enricher of post-exilic literature, Bernhard Stade.¹ The last-named scholar will not even use the help of Proverbs in his sketch of the Jewish Religion in the period between Nehemiah and Alexander the Great, and his disciple and continuer, Holtzmann, treats of Proverbs, Sirach and Pseudo-Phocylides in one and the same chapter.

In the present paper it is proposed to put together the main arguments on either side of the question, with a short criticism of their respective merits.

The evidence adducible is both internal and external. That the book from chapter x. to xxix. is a stringing together of gnomes, many of which must have been in existence a considerable time before the collections themselves were made, is indisputably evident, but for the purpose of illustrative quotation it is the date of the whole collections which is of the greater importance. For the collector will probably have picked out from, adapted and added to the material before him; and it is precisely the religious Proverbs that are least likely to reflect the religious views of any other age than his own. The heading in chapter x., affixed to the first collection (x.-xxii. 16) "Proverbs of Solomon" can scarcely be used as a good argument for a pre-exilic date, when one remembers how exceedingly improbable it is that a single one of our 150 Psalms is due to David, and how entirely out of place any of the religious and moral Proverbs would be in the mouth of King David's son.² Nor can the value of the heading for chapters

¹ Hooykas, *Proeve eener Geschiedenis der Beoefening van de Wijsheid onder de Hebreërs* (1862). Kuenen, *Historisch-critisch onderzoek naar het Ontstaan en de Verzameling van de Boeken des ouden Verbonds*. Derde Deel, 1st edition (1865). Delitzsch, *Commentary on Proverbs* (1873), or Article "Sprüche Salomonis," in Herzog-Plitt's *Real-Encyclopädie für Protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 2nd ed. Nowack, "Commentary on Proverbs," in the *Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament* (1883). Cheyne, *Job and Solomon; or the Wisdom of the Old Testament* (1887). Davidson, "Proverbs," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 9th ed. Reuss, *Geschichte der heiligen Schriften Alten Testaments* (1881), or *La Bible, Ancien Testament*. Sixième Partie. *Philosophie Religieuse et Morale des Hébreux* (1878). Stade, *Geschichte des Volks Israel*. Vol. II., p. 216, 292.

² The origin of the tradition attributing the Proverbs to Solomon will be similar to that attributing the Psalms to David. Compare Stade, *Geschichte des Volks Israel*, Vol. I., 309 f.

xxv.-xxix. be assessed at a much higher rate. "These are also Proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, King of Judah, copied out (העתיקו)." Nowack, indeed, while denying that the Proverbs which the men of Hezekiah thought to be Solomon's were really his, considers that we have no ground whatever to doubt the accuracy of the heading so far as it refers to Hezekiah (p. xxvii). Prof. Cheyne, too, says "That Hezekiah was the instigator of the compilation need not be disputed" (p. 143). But the value to be set on headings of this kind could not counterweigh any good internal evidence drawn from the compilation itself. Even if Hezekiah did attempt a collection of Proverbs, we can not be sure that we possess that collection in chapters xxv.-xxix. of our present book. The word "also" in the heading to those chapters proves that its author (clearly not one of Hezekiah's "men" himself) was already aware of the existence of chapters x.-xxii. 16, but it can almost conclusively be proved that xxv.-xxix. must nevertheless have had an entirely independent origin. Thus the men of Hezekiah could not have done what the heading attributes to them—gathered up the remaining fragments of Solomon's gnomic wisdom—and this fact seems to throw doubt upon the accuracy of the whole assertion. And it is also true, though perhaps of no particular moment, that the books of Chronicles know nothing of Hezekiah's labours in collecting Solomonic Proverbs.¹

Next let us consider the external evidence which can be drawn from illustrative passages in other books of the Bible. The question is at what age we are to look for the first appearance of a class of teachers, who, though looking at religion from their own distinctive point of view, were yet in sympathy with the main principles of the prophetic doctrine. The evidence culled from the Prophets does not really go very far. Isaiah once or twice uses words or phrases which belong to the distinctive phraseology of the wisdom literature, but this does not prove that the wise men of his day were the thoroughly religionised wise men of our canonical Proverbs. Thus for instance, in Isaiah xxix. 24, it is said "They also that erred in spirit shall get understanding (בִּינָה), and they that murmured shall receive instruction" (לָקוּז) "A word in the gnomic style, six times in Proverbs," Cheyne). So also the passage, Isaiah xxviii. 23-29 is considered gnomic (notice especially the word רוּשִׁיָּה in v. 29, which also occurs Micah vi. 9). But it cannot be said that moral lessons drawn from

¹ Compare Reuss, *Geschichte*, §§ 400-403, or *La Bible*, VI., pp. 150-157, and Stade, *Geschichte*, Vol. II., p. 216.

the processes of agriculture are found in Proverbs, and in Isaiah xxxii. 6-9, another passage with a certain gnomic tinge, the words כִּילִי¹ and כִּיב are not specially characteristic of them.

A parallel instance of another kind is furnished by Jeremiah ix. 23, of which the thought closely resembles Proverbs xx. 24, xvi. 9. Isaiah, it is said, emphasizes strongly the excellence of "wisdom" as a special gift of God. Thus (xi. 2) the spirit of God, which is to rest upon the Messiah, is divided up into a spirit of חכמה and בינה, a spirit of עצה and גבורה, a spirit of דעת and יראת יי, and in xxxiii. 6, the "steadfastness" of the regenerate Judah's "times" is said to consist in "a store of salvations," and in "wisdom and knowledge."² Are these passages sufficient evidence for Prof. Cheyne's view that "the prophets in tone and phraseology are sometimes evidently influenced by their fellow teachers," whose "friendly feeling" they thus returned? (p. 120.) On this hypothesis it is surprising that they do not more definitely refer to them. Kuenen, Hooykas and others have thought they saw such references in Amos v. 10 (compare Hosea iv. 4) and Isaiah xxix. 21, where there are friendly allusions to those who reprove in the gate (המוכיח בשער). But these passages probably allude to the judges, and are at any rate too slight and unsupported to allow of any deduction as to the existence of a class of religious wise men being validly drawn from them.³ What Isaiah and Jeremiah rather seem to point to is the existence of men whose wisdom was opposed to the prophetic teaching. Thus Isaiah inveighs against those "who are wise in their own eyes, and in their own view are understanding" (v. 21; compare Proverbs iii. 7, xxvi. 12) where Prof. Cheyne finds a possible allusion to "the indifferentist or humanist section of the class of 'wise men,' who had no positive religious belief" (compare also Isaiah xxviii. 14-22, xxix. 14-20, Jeremiah iv. 22, viii. 9), but in these passages we must, with Prof. Cheyne, probably understand, not like Ewald, "an opposition party of sceptical wise men," but either generally those who are (? afterwards) so often referred to in Proverbs as having "broken through the restraints of law and religion," or the politicians of the court, who were "popularly considered 'wise men' but not in

¹ For כִּילִי, meaning fool, Proverbs generally uses כִּסִּיל.

² Perhaps it should be noticed that Stade regards both these passages as post-exilic.

³ Hooykas, however, lays much stress upon these passages, and strongly denies that the "Reprovers in the Gate" can possibly mean the Judges (pp. 163, 123-127). His list of allusive passages in the Prophets (p. 37) is, I think, exaggerated.

the technical sense" of the book of Proverbs (page 120). By far the most significant allusion to the "wise men" is in Jeremiah xviii. 18, where the prophet's enemies are represented as saying, "Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for teaching (חִוּרָה) shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel (עֵצָה) from the wise, nor the word (דָּבָר) from the prophet." Yet here again it should be noted that the wise men referred to are not Jeremiah's followers, but the allies of his assailants.

On the whole not much, whether for or against a pre-exilic date, can be won from the allusions in the Prophets. Yet it would seem probable that the wise men of Isaiah and Jeremiah's days were not yet thoroughly penetrated with the spirit of the Yahvistic religion. "Wisdom" was originally a wide term with many applications. It was not thought to be the privilege of Israel only. The Edomites were famous for their wisdom, there were "wise men" also in Egypt (Jer. xlix. 7, Obad. 8, Isaiah xix. 11, 1 Kings iv. 31). It was only gradually that every branch of wisdom was regarded as the special gift of God. Thus Hiram the builder, whose father was a man of Tyre, "was filled (= happened to be filled) with wisdom and understanding and knowledge to work all works in brass" (1 Kings vii. 14), whereas in Exodus xxxi. 3 (a late chapter, see Kuenen, *Hexateuch*, § 6 n13) Bezaleel is directly filled "with the spirit of God, in wisdom and in understanding, and in knowledge and in all manner of workmanship" (compare Exodus xxxv. 31, 34, 35, and for agricultural skill as due to God, Isaiah xxviii. 26). The (? exilic) Deuteronomist bids the Israelites look for the mark of their own peculiar wisdom, in "keeping and doing" the "statutes and judgments" which had been given them by God and taught to them by Moses (Deut. iv. 6).

From the external evidence obtainable from passages outside Proverbs let us now turn to the internal evidence which the various collections themselves supply.

The language of Proverbs (apart from chapters xxx., xxxi., which by pretty general consent belong to the post-exilic epoch) does not seem to offer any very convincing proofs on either side. The Aramaisms which were adduced by Hartmann so long ago as 1833, are rebutted by Kuenen in his *Onderzoek*. Prof. Cheyne too thinks that his instances "require testing," and that "an argument of this sort (except in more extreme cases) is not conclusive as to date" (page 168). The gnomic form of the Proverbs would seem to stamp them as ancient, but ancient proverbs can be edited and adapted in a later era. The pithy distichs of the first collection (x.-xxii. 16) ap-

parently mark them out as not only the oldest portion of the book, but in themselves of great antiquity, and many scholars hold this view. Prof. Davidson, on the other hand, believes that the Hezekian collection (xxv.-xxix.) is the earlier in date. Its maxims, "particularly those in xxv.-xxvii., approach much nearer to what we should imagine the early popular proverb to have been than many of those in the other large collection; they are simple, usually contain a comparison, and have none of the abstractness which characterises many of the maxims in x.-xxii. This may be regarded as a guarantee of their great antiquity" (page 879*b*). No safe conclusions can thus be drawn from either the language or the form of the Proverbs; the balance, so far as I am able to judge, seems to incline towards the pre-exilic period.

We tread firmer ground when we come to deal with the contents of the book, and the inferences that may be gathered both from what it says and from what it leaves unmentioned.

Even a cursory reader of Proverbs cannot fail to have noticed how wholly disconnected with Israel and its fortunes are the religion and the morality which they teach. God is indeed called by his Jewish name Yahveh, but the word Israel does not occur once. The aspirations and the calamities of their people are never alluded to by these calmly contemplative Sages; its institutions and its history are alike unnoticed. Thus no mention is made of priest or prophet (except one doubtful allusion in xxix. 18), the coming of the Messiah or of the messianic age is not desired or anticipated, and idolatry receives no reprimand. Thus we have apparently to assume the existence of a class of teachers who were earnest inculcators of justice, temperance, and truth, and who closely identified the practice of these virtues with religion (= the fear of Yahveh), but who showed no particular interest in Israel's national religious institutions or in the men whose life was bound up with them. If this class of teachers lived before the exile, we must add that, while they agreed with the Prophets that moral wickedness is irreconcilable with the fear of God, they paid no attention whatever (although they were not theorists but practical men of the world) to the other great popular sin of that time, to the degraded worship of Yahveh and to the worship of other gods.

One cannot help wondering whether in the troubled times that lie between the 9th or 8th century and the fall of the Jewish State, when the popular religion and the higher teaching of the Prophets were fighting for the mastery, there is room for these sober teachers, who, interested as they are in the moral and religious well-being of their people, never

allude to the very subject round and in which, according to the Prophets, the religious and moral deflections of the people circle and centre. Moreover, in the teaching of Proverbs there seems no allusion to any existing difference of opinion as to what goodness and badness imply; yet the good and the bad form two sharply contrasted classes, one God-fearing and strictly moral, the other heedless of all restraint, whether human or divine. It appears to be assumed that the judgment passed upon the moral worth of both classes would be acknowledged as true by any ordinary listener or reader. This argument for a post-exilic date is well brought out by Prof. Oort, so far as Proverbs i.-ix. are concerned, in an essay in the *Theologisch Tijdschrift* (1885). Something of the same kind had already been urged for the whole book by Vatke in his famous *Biblische Theologie*. Vatke holds that the wise men were the successors of the Prophets, the prophetic enthusiasm or inspiration passing into the form of contemplative reflection. "The former opposition between the outward worship and the freer prophetic teaching was now changed into the careful adhesion to the letter of the Levitical Law on the one hand, and on the other into a free reflectiveness which even got rid of particularism altogether. Meanwhile the lyric inspiration continued, uniting in itself and reconciling both these opposite moods" (pages 552 and 563). But without estimating the value of this more general argument, which rests on an interpretation of the development of Judaism between Nehemiah and the Maccabees which cannot in this place be even adequately explained, far less criticised,¹ it must, I think, be allowed that the absence of any allusion to idolatry is an exceedingly powerful piece of evidence for the post-exilic date. How is it to be explained, cries Reuss, that a book which sets itself to preach all human duties, to inculcate all the virtues, and to combat all the foibles and evil passions of the human heart, could have forgotten or neglected this prime aberration, the source of so many vices, if it was still in existence when the compilation was made? (*La Bible*, VI., page 156.)

Delitzsch's explanation—that the wise men, true to their universalism, leaving the battle with heathenism to the Prophets, confined themselves to their special vocation of naturalising in the Yahvistic religion the treasures of general moral and religious truth, and using them for the ennoblement

¹ Thus Holtzmann regards Proverbs as the product of the Ptolemæan epoch, when the gradual diffusion of Hellenic culture was making many Jews turn their main attention to the general and universal elements in their national religion.

of Israelites as men—seems to me scarcely adequate (page 35, compare Hooykas, pages 61-62).

Yet if the absence of any reference to idolatry favours a post-exilic date, is it so sure that the silence respecting the priesthood points in the same direction? And, above all, what is the attitude of Proverbs to the Law, which after Nehemiah becomes the acknowledged standard of religious practice?

By the beginning of the second century before Christ, the Law and the priesthood were too closely connected with Jewish piety for even one of the wise men to neglect them. The attitude of Sirach is very significant. He does not disguise the purely Jewish character of the wisdom he teaches; he offers prayers for Israel's prosperity and for the conversion of the nations in the manner of the Psalmists. The Law he speaks of is unquestionably the Pentateuch, and next to the fear of the Lord comes the reverence of his priests (vii. 29). Wisdom itself is practically identified with "the Book of the Covenant of the Most High God" (xxiv. 23). It would seem as if an interval of many long years, and not merely a difference of character or view, must separate this writer from the authors of Proverbs. In Proverbs it is doubtful whether the *תורה* and the *מצות* which are now and again mentioned refer to the Pentateuch at all.¹ Both Delitzsch and Hooykas strongly deny that they can ever bear this application. "The word *תורה*," says the former, "has a far wider and less definite connotation than that of the written Sinaitic Law (cp. xxviii. 4, xxix. 18, with xxviii. 7, xiii. 14, and similar passages)." Kuenen, in his *Onderzoek*, thinks this assertion exaggerated. In his opinion, xxviii. 4, 7, probably, and xxviii. 9, xxix. 18, certainly refer to a written code. Even these last two verses are, however, doubtful:

He that turneth away his ear from hearkening to the Law,
Even his prayer is an abomination.
Where there is no vision (*חזון*) the people grow wild,
But if they keep the Law, they are happy.

In the last passage *תורה* may very probably refer to the prophetic teaching, and in the former to God's revealed word generally. At any rate, the references to *the תורה* in Proverbs, even if they exist, are very different in kind from those in Sirach. There are, moreover, few allusions to particular enactments. The most important is in iii. 9: "Honour the Lord with thy substance (*מהונך*) and with the first fruits

¹ Compare the passages x. 8; xiii. 13, 14; xvi. 20; xix. 16; xxviii. 4, 7, 9; xxix. 18; xxxi. 26; i. 8; ii. 1; iii. 1; iv. 2, 4; vi. 20, 23; vii. 1, 2.

of all thy increase (מֵרֵאשִׁית כָּל הַבֹּאֲרֵךְ)¹ Vows are referred to in xx. 25, vii. 15, and Lev. v. 1 would seem to be the legal basis of xxix. 24. Kuenen, on the other hand, has pointed out that vi. 31 seems to conflict with Ex. xxi. 37 and vii. 15 with Deut. xii. 17.

Prof. Davidson asks very pertinently whether these meagre allusions to the Law are compatible with the hypothesis of a post-exilic date. If other arguments are sufficient to substantiate that hypothesis, a later date than the beginning of the fourth century will at any rate hardly be conceivable. To these more general considerations I will now add a variety of more particular arguments on either side. First may come those which tell for the pre-exilic date.

(1.) Excluding the undoubtedly post-exilic thirtieth chapter, the authors of Proverbs do not show any trace of religious perplexity. The old doctrine of accurate earthly retribution satisfies them still. If it be said that Sirach accepts this doctrine no less than the Sages of Proverbs, and that he, too, puts forward no doubt as to the justice of God, Prof. Davidson replies that this is because Sirach, although aware of these speculations, "consciously declines to entertain them" (p. 881 *a*).

(2.) There are several proverbs in the collection which would have no application in the post-exilic period, and would scarcely have even been incorporated into a compilation made at that time; such are xxii. 28, xxiii. 10, xxix. 18.

(3.) The kings occupy a prominent place in Proverbs. In x.-xxii. 16 the references to kingship seem to accentuate its good side (xiv. 35, xvi. 10-15, xx. 8, 26, 28, xxii. 11; cp. also xxiv. 21): in xxv.-xxix., we hear more of the evils wrought by bad kings and foolish rulers (xxix. 2, xxviii. 2, 16). Thus it is supposed that x.-xxii. 16 dates from the earlier and better period of the monarchy, xxv.-xxix. from the days of its decline and fall. As to this last point, Prof. Davidson, in arguing for the earlier date of xxv.-xxix. has already shown its partial weakness (p. 883 *a*). It has also been said that Sirach never refers to kings, but this is an error (vii. 4, 5, x. 3, xi. 5. Cp. Proverbs xxxi. 4, Ecclesiastes iv. 13, viii. 4, xi. 6, 17, 20). It is, therefore, quite possible that the kings of Proverbs did not reign in Samaria or Jerusalem.

(4.) The condition of society in i.-ix., which is generally acknowledged to be later than x.-xxix., favours a pre-exilic

¹ Hooykas (page 154, note 2) defends Ewald's translation, "More than thy substance, etc."

date. The city in which the scene is laid is populous, and enjoys much material prosperity. Prof. Cheyne consequently argues that before the time of Sirach, there is no period in the post-exile history in which the life of Jerusalem can have resembled the picture given of it in Proverbs i.-ix. (p. 168). It might, however, be noted, on the other side, that even Haggai already speaks of men dwelling in "inlaid houses."

(5.) There are many reminiscences of Deuteronomy in Proverbs i.-ix. (cp. iii. 3, vi. 21, vii. 3, with Deut. vi. 4-9; xi. 18-21, and iii. 12 with Deut. viii. 5). Who, asks Delitzsch, can fail to hear in Prov. i. 7-ix. an echo of the Shema of Deuteronomy? (p. 29). It is therefore supposed that i.-ix. was written only shortly after Deuteronomy, that is, between Josiah and the fall of Jerusalem.

(6.) There is no trace of any post-exilic narrow-mindedness and sterility (Nowack). This argument seems to me of little or no value. Are not Jonah and Ruth undoubtedly post-exilic, and, turning the tables upon Nowack, is a catholicity of temperament to be expected, outside the Prophets, before the Captivity?

The counter-arguments for the later date include the following:

(1.) The high position assigned to woman, and the prevailing monogamic point of view seem incongruous with an early period in the nation's history; moreover, it is only the Judaism of the Second Temple which came to lay such great stress upon chastity. The "strange woman" forms a prominent theme of chapters i.-ix., but she is not unknown in the earlier collections (cp. xxii. 14, xxiii. 27, 28). Prof. Oort lays the greatest stress upon this argument in his essay upon i.-ix. It is not quite clear, however, who the "strange woman" is. Some, *e.g.* Reuss, think she is always a wife, an adulteress pure and simple, and not a foreigner; the mere harlot, he holds, is not alluded to in i.-ix. While in xxiii. 28, he translates the זונה and the נכריה by *courtisane* and *la femme adultère*, as if they were separate people, in vi. 26 he renders אישה זונה and איש זונה as if they were one and the same person. It seems more probable, to judge at least by vi. 26, that the Sage warns his pupils against harlotry as well as adultery. With some other scholars, Prof. Oort holds that the strange woman (נכריה) is a foreigner, and finds an extra proof of the late origin of i.-ix. in the inclination to doubt the capacity for chastity in the married women of foreigners.¹

¹ Compare especially ii. 17. Delitzsch's note is confused. If נכריה must mean foreigner, how are אלוה, and "the covenant of her God" to be ex-

(2.) Stade thinks that the personification of wisdom and her relation to Deity in chap. viii. were not the fruit of unaided Jewish speculation. He detects in them the influence of Hellenism. If this is denied, it is at least probable that they represent a later stage of thought than that of Deutero-Isaiah (cp. Reuss, *La Bible*, VI., 156).

(3.) Possible parallels between Isaiah ii. and Prov. i.-ix. have also been alleged. Compare Prov. ii. 15, Is. lix. 8; Prov. i. 24, Is. lxv. 12, lxvi. 4.¹

(4.) There are several parallels between Proverbs and the Psalms. If the post-exilic origin of the Psalms is assumed, the parallels are obviously important. Psalms xxxvii. and xlix. present many features akin to Proverbs, while some of the more isolated parallels are the following:² Prov. x. 7, 28, Ps. cxii. 6, 10; Prov. x. 22, Ps. cxxvii. 2; Prov. xiv. 21, Ps. xli. 2; Prov. xv. 11, Ps. cxxxix. 8; Prov. xv. 25, Ps. cxlvi. 9; Prov. xix. 21, Ps. xxxiii. 11; Prov. xx. 12, Ps. xciv. 9; Prov. xxi. 31, Ps. xx. 7; Prov. xxiii. 6, Ps. cxli. 4.

(5.) I venture to add here an argument, of the validity of which I feel doubtful, but which still deserves consideration. It is the use of שְׁאוֹל (Sheol) in Proverbs. Prof. Cheyne, with many other scholars, has denied that the idea of a future (blessed) life was known to the Sages, and it is undoubtedly a fact that even Sirach, following his predecessors, somewhat pointedly asserts the finality of death, as if other notions were current in his day, but seemed to him outlandish and false (cp. also Ecclesiastes). Yet Oehler has already indicated how mysterious a veil is thrown over the death of the righteous in Proverbs.³ Sheol seems to be the lot of the wicked only. The attitude of the Sages is not unlike that of the authors of the late Psalms xlix. or lxxiii. Delitzsch, in drawing conclusions from the corrupt distichs xii. 28 and xiv. 32 (see Cheyne, pp. 122, 123), goes obviously too far, but he is right in saying

plained? Oort translates אֱלוֹף by *leideman* (guide), *opvoeder* (teacher), (LXX. διδάσκαλον), and thinks it refers to God, but the God is her own God, not Israel's. This partial acknowledgment of a foreign God he compares with Malachi i. 11. In chapters vi. and vii. he thinks married women are referred to; in ii. and v. "*hetairai*," including harlots.

¹ The general resemblances between Isaiah lix. and Prov. i.-ix. are not without significance. "The Prophet," according to Prof. Cheyne, "is, at any rate, influenced by some proverbial work similar to Prov. i.-ix." (p. 166). Prof. Graetz (*Geschichte*, 2b, 384) lays considerable stress upon the parallelism, and holding Isaiah lix. to be exilic, relegates Prov. i.-ix. to the exilic period also. Against this view chapter vii. alone seems to offer insuperable obstacles. But Isaiah lix. is probably not exilic, but post-exilic. Cp. the review of Kuenen's *Onderzoek*, in the April number of this *Review*.

² With Prov. i.-ix. the parallels are more numerous.

³ *Alttestamentliche Theologie*, p. 858.

that Sheol in Proverbs does not refer to death in general, but to a death which carries man off in his sins, and before his time. Notice the gnomes:—

- (Withhold not correction from the child,
For if thou beatest him with the rod, he will not die).
Thou beatest him with the rod,
And deliverest his soul from Sheol.
(xxiii. 14, a verse noticed by Stade as belonging to a very late period).
There is a path of life upwards for the wise,
That he may escape Sheol beneath. (xv. 24.)
He knoweth not that the shades are there ;
And that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.
(ix. 18. Compare vii. 27, v. 5, ii. 18.)

Here the conception of Sheol, according to Delitzsch, tends to pass into that of Gehinnom ; from being the dwelling-place of all the dead, good or bad alike, to be the receptacle of the wicked only. Life is identified with virtue, sin and death are synonymous:—

The labour of the righteous leadeth to life ;
The revenue of the wicked to sin. (x. 16.)

These passages seem to mark a kind of midway station between the oldest Hebrew notions, in which death was a misfortune, but not a punishment, and the later teaching, in which Hades changes into Hell.

(6.) The gnomes of Proverbs are mainly concerned with the individual. Individualism we know to be a comparatively late growth in the development of the Jewish religion ; its claims are first strongly recognised by Ezekiel.

(7.) A prominent feature in Proverbs is the conception of discipline or instruction (מִסְכָּר). This point is well brought out by Holtzmann (*Geschichte des Volks Israel*, p. 297). "Life is regarded from the point of view of a pedagogic institution. God educates men, and men educate each other." These conceptions rest upon the existence of a settled national ideal of good and bad, which was not thoroughly formed till after the exile. This argument goes back to one of the more general considerations, which was touched upon before.

(8.) Lastly, as an amusing contrast to Nowack's plea for a pre-exilic date, may be quoted Stade's argument for the opposite view. "The matter of fact observations about the actions and fortunes of man ; the cool, sagacious judgments upon the value of the external goods of life, and the counsels given to the sensible citizen who is anxious to adopt a course of life which will lead to their attainment, are all based upon and take for granted the monotheism and the belief in divine

retribution that are characteristic of Judaism" (*Geschichte*, II., p. 216).

The conclusion to be drawn from these various arguments seems to me in favour of the post-exilic date: The proofs for that view go more to the root of the matter, and deal with more essential and pervading elements of the whole book than those upon the other side. The civic luxury and populousness suggested by i.-ix., the reminiscences from Deuteronomy, the frequent appearance of the king, can be more easily got over and explained than the silence respecting idolatry, the individualism of the teaching, the praise of chastity, the monogamic point of view, and the general coolness and certainty of temper and tone. The real *cruz* of the matter is, where and when the phenomenon of the "wise men" and their teaching may best be fitted in. Where and whensoever it be, certain common-places of the newer criticism will have to be modified because of them. If they lived and taught before the exile, then certainly some of the deepest truths of the Prophets must have been far more widely accepted and assimilated than the prophetic or historical books would otherwise have led us to imagine. If, on the contrary, we assign their influence to a period after Nehemiah, we must assume that the life under the Law did not necessarily tend to produce that narrowness of mind and mood, that absorbing interest in ceremonialism and the written Word, and that rigidly particularist point of view, which are all so frequently ascribed to it. Moreover, though the important differences between Proverbs and Sirach would seem to indicate that a lapse of many generations must lie between them, Ecclesiastes is little earlier than Sirach, and he is as "humanist" and "universal" in his teaching as any of the older Sages. Neither Koheleth nor the author of Jonah may have been as exceptional in their views in these respects as we, through their isolation in the Canonical Scriptures, naturally incline to believe. When the supremacy of the Law had been once securely established, and a definite religious stamp impressed upon the community, the universalist tendencies of monotheism which are visible in the Law itself came gradually to the fore. (A priest naturally looks at religion from his own priestly point of view, so that the books of Chronicles must not be regarded as a convincing refutation of the argument.) Before those external influences appeared upon the scene, which to some seemed inimical to the very principles of Judaism, and therefore heightened the value they set upon all its forms and ceremonies, the general belief in one God not unnaturally produced a series of teachers who were very possibly dutiful children of the Mosaic Law,

but whose teaching and thought were but little touched by the Temple services or moulded by the phrases of the written Code. When Hellenism brought into view a new culture which to many proved seductive, it was not improbable, even before persecution engendered the usual passionate attachment to the forbidden object, that more conservative spirits should have refused to see a phase of Yahveh's wisdom in that which led to the neglect of his commandments, or should have begun to lay more and more stress upon those elements in their religion which marked them off from the new learning and the foreign civilization. If this line of argument be correct, critics will have to unlearn the customary assumption that the Law in itself necessarily tended to stifle every wide and liberal religious impulse, and drive all who paid it allegiance into the narrow groove of letter-worship and formalism.

I have purposely avoided any allusion either to the parallels to Job, or to the unquestioned and unquestioning monotheism of Proverbs, because the date of Job is itself uncertain, and the era when pure monotheism was first commonly taught and believed is still *sub judice*. What makes the dispute respecting the date of Proverbs so specially interesting is the very doubt on which side of this controversy its valuable evidence may properly be used.

If Stade is right, and the religion and morality of Proverbs represent a phase of post-exilic Judaism, it is important to consider what estimate should be assigned to them. We must, I think, be very careful to distinguish between the elements (both good and bad) of this teaching, which may be laid to the credit or the charge of Judaism generally, and those which are mainly or even exclusively due to the peculiar character of the literature to which the book of Proverbs belongs. Thus the lack of passion and enthusiasm in Proverbs (its *Nüchternheit*) is a characteristic of gnomic literature generally. In religion as in other things, *μηδεν ἄγαν*. We must not expect to find in Proverbs the mystic fervour of the Psalms. But it is surely ignorance or prejudice which would regard the want of the mystic element in piety as a characteristic of Judaism. This is what Prof. Chavannes does when he says of the author of Proverbs i.-ix.: "On sent bien à de tels passages (*e.g.* vi. 29-35) que notre auteur, pour représenter le bon judaïsme, reste cependant en plein judaïsme, que l'élément mystique de la piété lui fait trop défaut."¹ It

¹ Chavannes, *La Religion dans la Bible*, I., page 393. What a useful word, by the way, "Judaic" is for some theologians, and what a wide connotation

is to be hoped that this unsupported assertion may before long meet with refutation from a hand more competent than mine. It is the Talmudic literature itself—the incarnation, I should imagine, of “le bon Judaïsme”—which will supply for that refutation a full and satisfactory material.

In Proverbs the teaching of the Prophets has been so well assimilated, that religion and morality are closely identified with each other. “He who walks uprightly, fears God (*i.e.* is religious); he who is perverse in his ways despises him.” “Whoso mocks the poor reproaches his Maker.” “The reward of humility is the fear of God.” Another point in which the Sages resemble the Prophets, is that they pay no attention whatever to the thousand and one shades and *nuances* which bridge over the gap between the righteous and the wicked. The Sages know, indeed, that human righteousness is merely comparative: for “who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from sin?” There is also no trace of self-righteousness about them. The humility they preach is quite sincere. But mankind is nevertheless, to their eyes, split up into two classes; the good and wise on one side; the bad and foolish on the other. The good have all the virtues; the bad have all the vices. Moreover, the good become better and better; the bad, (nor are the sages very sorry), go from worse to worse. This is a defect. The noble doctrine of Ezekiel, “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die, saith the Lord God, and not that he should return from his ways and live?” was not applied and expanded by any great Jewish teacher before Jesus of Nazareth, in whose life and teaching the loving refusal to recognise the permanent badness of any human soul or its incapacity to turn to the light and be saved, is a striking and fruitful feature.

The catalogue of virtues upon which the Sages lay stress is no small one, and the ideal man whom they sketch out to us would pass muster before an exacting criticism.

Like Aristotle’s moral hero he would possess a certain amount of “external goods,” but not too much of them, lest he should become full and deny his God (xxx. 8). He would be charitable to the indigent, and recognise that the poor and the rich are alike the creatures of God. He would show reverence to his parents and love to his wife. In business he would be scrupulously honest, in public matters rigorously just. He would avoid slander and tale-bearing; but where words would serve

it has! It means at will “particularist,” “formal,” “legal,” “self-righteous,” “without enthusiasm,” “narrow,” “eudæmonist,” “vengeful,” etc., etc Compare “*Zug*” and “*Schlag*” in German. *Tramp Abroad*, page 545.

good purpose, he would not shrink to speak them. He would not requite evil with evil, but be willing to forgive. Enemies he might have, yet over their fall he would not rejoice, but help them readily when it lay within his power. He would be industrious and zealous in his daily labour, regarding the fruit it yielded as a blessing from heaven ; but if trouble came and misfortune, he would not murmur, for he would see in them the loving discipline of God. He would be truthful and temperate in action and in speech. He would not merely take care that his actions came up to a certain outward standard, but before all things he would give heed to his "heart" as the source alike of good and evil. He would know that sacrifices are no counterbalance against wickedness, but like the prophet, he would acknowledge that true religion was comprised in justice, lovingkindness and humility.

This after all represents no meagre ideal, and that it is not exaggerated, every careful reader of Proverbs should, I think, allow. For it must be remembered that this catalogue of virtues, if decked out in elegant phrases and artfully made the most of from a literary point of view, would look far more comprehensive and imposing, than when simply described in inventory fashion, one virtue after another. The "staid, quiet, 'douce,' orderly burgher, diligent in his business, prosperous in his affairs, of repute among the elders, with daughters doing virtuously, and a wife that has his house decked with coverings of tapestry, while her own clothing is silk and purple" (Cheyne, p. 296, quoted from Mr. Binney), does not deal adequately or even fairly with the wise man of Proverbs.

One cannot deny that there is mixed up with the more ideal teaching of the Sages, a certain amount of worldly wisdom. Although they are aware of the vanity of riches, deprecate the striving after wealth, and frequently urge the superiority of small means, combined with religion and love, over great treasure with disquietude and hatred, they are quite alive to the advantages of the well-to-do over the poor. But, is this more than honesty? Again the self-restraint of the wise man tends to degenerate into a cautious selfishness. The repeated warnings against suretyship are anything but pleasing, and in the lofty praise of wisdom (i.-ix.) they sound a rather jarring note. But Reuss seems to hit the nail upon the head when he says :

On y rencontre bien par ci par là certaines règles de prudence qui n'accusent pas précisément un sentiment bien généreux, un cœur noble et dévoué, mais qui prennent le monde tel qu'il est, et se bornent à mettre les gens, qui ont besoin de conseils, en garde contre les déboires

qui peuvent résulter pour eux de leur inexpérience. Ailleurs et plus souvent encore l'enseignement s'arrête à constater les faits tels qu'ils se produisent dans le cours ordinaire des choses, surtout ceux qui sont la conséquence des défauts moraux ou intellectuels des hommes, et laisse au lecteur le soin d'en tirer telle leçon qu'il voudra. (Page 159).

A somewhat violent attack has been recently made by Prof. Oort upon the morality of chapters i.-ix. He is especially hard upon the motives with which the author urges his disciples to do good and to refrain from evil. According to Prof. Oort, they are purely utilitarian. Why should one have nothing to do with the cozening adulteress? Because one will be robbed. Why should one not "cast in one's lot" with sinners? Because they will come to a bad end. Why should one try to find wisdom? Because wisdom leads to honour, reputation, long life and riches. In short, do good and be wise because it pays; avoid evil and folly because in the long run they do not. Prof. Oort thinks this lowness of motive is a sign that we have to do with a writer who lived under the Law. He was in possession of no religious principle which could form a counterpoise against the ever growing legalism of his time, and its two mournful results, formalism and eudæmonism. So here again we have to do with a specially Jewish fault, the consequence of that dreadful Law, under the bondage of which the spirit of religion was so cruelly fettered and wronged. To Prof. Oort, legalism is like the reddest rag to the most irritable bull. He is always on the watch for its horrors!

But though painful to certain Jewish prepossessions, are not Prof. Oort's strictures true? The answer, I think, is that they are only a distorted representation of the truth. The Sages believed strongly in the doctrine of earthly retribution, and they also held that, *cæteris paribus*, sufficient means, honour, and length of days were better than poverty, disgrace, and an early death. But though they maintained that under normal circumstances wisdom and righteousness were followed by honour, length of days and sufficient means, it is not true that they desired these virtues merely because of their results; wisdom and righteousness were ends in themselves, to be sought first and foremost; if they are so sought, the other and lower goods will follow. (Compare Matthew vi. 33: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.") So to Solomon, who asked not for long life, nor for riches, nor the life of his enemies, God thought it just to promise riches and honour and length of days. The Sages do not mean to say "Do good because it pays," though they are equally far from saying "Do good although it does not

pay." They will not allow themselves to believe that honesty is not always the best policy. They are therefore inclined to give false judgments like the friends of Job. We must remember that they did not clearly believe in a compensatory future life, and God's just and merciful rule over man was for them only capable of being manifested upon earth. But is it true that in chapter viii. wisdom is praised because riches and honour are with her? Yes, but it is also true, though not mentioned by Prof. Oort, that men are urged "to receive wisdom's instructions, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold." This contrast is curiously characteristic. Wisdom is more precious than riches, and yet wisdom brings riches. Wisdom, in truth, to the gnostic writers implied and included the whole principle of life with all its goods both spiritual and temporal. Folly, on the other hand, represented death with all its evils. Life and righteousness, death and sin are closely connected ideas (x. 16). The love of wisdom is the secret of well being. Great peace and happiness have they who strive after wisdom and possess it. But this wisdom, which is rooted in the fear of God, has a distinctively religious tone, and since it is the pole-star of all the Sages' actions and thoughts, it is untrue to say that they have no religious principle to steer them safely through the difficulties of life. Eudæmonism, it is true, is a part of their creed, but this is not because they have no principle, but because eudæmonism is itself an element in that principle, the eudæmonism which to Sages and Prophets alike was inseparably connected with the justice and mercy of God. The search of that wisdom which is based upon the fear of the Lord, leads, after a willing acceptance of the discipline both of man and God, to prosperity and well being.¹ But will they who seek for wisdom *in order to* reach prosperity really obtain it? Will they be seeking for it in the way the Sages really intended? I feel convinced that if this question had been fairly put to them, they would have answered "No." Can the merely worldly wise feel that stern, uncompromising hatred of evil which is a fundamental element in the fear of God?

It is at first sight a strong and most damaging argument against the high morality of the Sages, that they habitually (in i.-ix.) warn their hearers against vice because of the unfortunate results to which vice may lead. That adultery is a sin, and as such morally hateful, is never so much as mentioned (compare Chavannes, *Ibid.*). Yet it would be surely

¹ This principle was quite sufficient to keep them from "formalism," of which in all Proverbs there is no trace.

absurd to suppose that adultery was only objectionable to them *because* it led to beggary and misfortune. Gnostic teaching can never be the highest teaching. Righteousness has to be regarded as a phase of wisdom, and vice as a phase of folly. But how are you to prove the foolishness of folly except by pointing to the miserable issues to which it leads? Again, gnostic teaching looks at good and evil from a personal point of view; its business is to show that it is to one's (spiritual and material) advantage to be good and wise, and in working upon these lines the author of i.-ix. is but true to the traditions of his class. His fault is not to be laid at the door of the Torah. It is true that he often seems to preach wisdom and goodness by means of bribery. A critic has asked whether the wearisome reiteration of "Saith the Lord" (יְהוָה אָמַר) in the short utterances of Haggai is not due to the fact that the Prophet felt some occasional uncertainty in his own prophetic inspiration, and was thus the more eager to emphasize it continually. Is it possible that through the hard teaching of actual life, the author of Proverbs i.-ix. (like the author of Psalm xxxvii.?) was sometimes a little doubtful as to the unvarying truth of his eudæmonistic principle, but knowing no higher or more satisfactory theodicy, clung to it and repeated it and taught it with all the greater and more insistent vigour? Did he know no better method of winning over the young to ways of probity and religion, than by reiterating half-truths which his auditors or readers had already begun to cavil at and to deny? If this be so, the author is superior to his teaching. I admit that Prof. Oort had more verses to quote for his view than I have had for mine, but I cannot help thinking that even in the most utilitarian passages of i.-ix. we can, or even ought to, read between the lines. He who wrote that noble praise of wisdom found in the search for and the love of it a higher good than riches and honour could win for him. The peace which wisdom gave was, for all his eudæmonism, akin to that peace of religion of which it has been said that it passes understanding.

My defence of Proverbs will scarcely obtain a convert. Proverbs is the sort of book which, as men look at it from one point of view or another, can be judged in very different ways. To Prof. Oort, even the author of i.-ix., the "glorious little treatise at the head of our book" (Cheyne, page 156), is a teacher without a religious principle, whose disciples, if they received no better light elsewhere, would inevitably degenerate even below their master. His view of life is ordinary, his advice commonplace, his motives ignoble. To a gifted Jewish authoress the book of Proverbs "teaches a

theology simple indeed, but all-sufficient for attaining moral strength and single-minded purity," while "it insists upon a life of rectitude and self-denial, not merely on account of the worldly advantages it may secure, but for its own sake and from religious motives."¹ This estimate is, I think, on the whole truer than Prof. Oort's; and mankind may still find something to learn from the Sages who clung so earnestly to the belief in God's just government of the world, and who found in the faithful fulfilment of duty and of the divine will a satisfaction which was not lessened or embittered even by the anticipation of death.²

P.S.—A few remarks, by way of postscript, upon the Wisdom of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus may reflect some further light upon Proverbs. That Sirach closely studied and frequently imitated Proverbs is obvious. It is more interesting to note how curiously similar the teaching of the one book is to that of the other. In B.C. 180 (the proximate date of Sirach), the religion and morality of a Wise Man were in many essential points identical with those of the earlier Sages. That is the ground for Holtzmann's opinion that no very considerable number of years can have intervened between Proverbs and Sirach. The range of goodness in Sirach is hardly less extended than in Proverbs, and it extends no further. In either book it is the same virtues and vices that are extolled and deplored. Justice, temperance, chastity, contentment, humility, and charity are the main moral adornments of the ideal Sage in either collection. The weaker sides of the teaching in Proverbs, its utilitarianism and prudential cautiousness, its insistence upon an outward form of retribution, its narrow views on education, are all echoed and re-echoed in Sirach. Sirach seems, indeed, to be designedly and deliberately conservative; many a doctrine, which was current in the Judaism of his day (*e.g.*, that of angels and evil spirits, and of the resurrection), are conspicuously absent from his pages.

Occasionally a favourite doctrine of Proverbs becomes refined in the younger Sage's mouth, as *e.g.*:

In thy charity add no reproach,
With thy gifts cause no pain by thy words.
(xviii. 14, the Authorised Version rendering is inaccurate.)
Reproach not a man that turns from sin,
Remember we are all worthy of punishment. (viii. 5.)
Say not, I will hide myself from God,
Shall any remember me from above?
Among a numerous people I shall not be remembered,
What is my soul in the infinite creation? (xvi. 15.)

On the other hand, the educational maxims of Sirach are feebler than those of Proverbs. Unhappy the children who were taught under his principles! A noble wife is still God's highest gift, but the warnings

¹ *The History and Literature of the Israelites*, by C. and A. de Rothschild, Vol. II., p. 257. Compare Delitzsch's high estimate of Proverbs, *Commentary*, p. 35, and Oehler *Alttestamentliche Theologie*, p. 836-865.

² Reuss, *La Bible*, pp. 160.

against unchastity take a form that is often repulsive to Europeans. The cautiousness of Proverbs bears sometimes a dangerous resemblance to selfishness in Sirach; thus the bidding to cultivate a merry heart once degenerates into the advice to forget the dead as soon as propriety allows (xxxviii. 16-23). The Sages' sharp division of mankind into two classes, the good and the bad, the wise and the foolish, with but little anticipation of (or desire for) the passing of the second class into the first, recurs frequently in Sirach, and is even idealised by a sort of philosophical justification (xxxvi. 7-15).

The main difference from Proverbs relates to Sirach's attitude towards the Law and the Priesthood, and to his strongly emphasized particularism. Before that is indicated further, there are one or two other points relating to his general moral and religious teaching which deserve notice.

(a.) Sirach does not accept the new doctrine of the resurrection. And unlike the authors of Proverbs, he frequently refers to death, not merely as the penalty of the wicked, but as the end of all men, good and bad alike—an end not to be feared or murmured at, and sometimes even to be desired (xli. 1-4, xl. 28, xxx. 5, xxii. 9, 10, xiv. 16, 17, etc.). It is as if the Sages of Proverbs, feeling the religious difficulty, intentionally ignored the death of the righteous, which, because death was an evil, they could not satisfactorily explain; perhaps, too, as with some Psalmists, the fulness and wealth of the higher life in the service of Wisdom and Wisdom's God blotted out for them the vision of death. Then thought advances; on the one hand, Sirach accepts and is satisfied with death, as the natural end of all mankind; on the other hand, as in 2 Macc., heroism is supported under torture by the hope of resurrection.

(b.) Prof. Cheyne instances as one of the six classes of sayings in Sirach which "offend the Christian sentiment," the distich,

Happy the man who has not offended in his speech,
And is not pricked with grief for sins. (xiv. 1.)

Sirach certainly reckons himself among the pure in heart and wise of speech. But we must not lay too much stress upon this. We saw before that Sirach also wrote, "We are all worthy of punishment." Before God or an absolute standard all are sinners, but among men there are differences. Sirach is conscious that he belongs to the good class, to those who have tried not unsuccessfully to keep the commandments of God. The Pharisaic self-righteousness, of which Prof. Cheyne sees the seeds in Sirach, assumes in some men the form of an almost Homeric *naïveté*. And men may differ widely in theory and expression as to their own sinfulness, and yet at the same time be possessed of an equal amount of virtue or of vice. The odious Pharisaism, so justly held up to scorn in Luke xviii. 11, is not more odious than that of the sanctimonious hypocrite, who, emphasizing his corrupt and sinful state, uses the humility of the lips as a stalking-horse for the pride of his heart; nor is real humility incompatible with a peaceful and happy conviction that life has been spent in the conscious striving after a fulfilment of God's word.

(c.) Sirach, in common with other writers of his time, ascribes a peculiar efficacy to charity. Proverbs (x. 2) declares:

Treasures of wickedness profit nothing;
But righteousness delivers from death. (x. 2.)
Riches profit not in the day of wrath;
But righteousness delivers from death. (xi. 4.)

Its opposition to riches shows that righteousness (צדקה) tends to imply in these passages something akin to charity.

In Daniel (iv. 27), in Tobit, and in Sirach this doctrine is definitely particularised. In them it would seem as if an atoning virtue were ascribed to mere alms-giving, as an *opus operatum*, as if one could buy off the consequence of sin by the payment of money, or at most by the mechanical execution of a stated virtue. The verse in Daniel runs "And now, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to thee, and break off thy sins by almsgiving (צדקה) and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity." Here the LXX. renders פָּרַךְ by πάσας τὰς ἀδικίας σου ἐν ἐλεημοσύναις λύτρωσαι, which certainly means "redeem, buy off, thine iniquities by alms-giving." So Tobit (xii. 9), "Alms deliver from death and shall purge (ἀποκαθαρίει) all sin." And in Sirach the virtue of ἐλεημοσύνη is frequently referred to, e.g. "Water will quench a flaming fire, and alms-giving will make an atonement for sin." But objectionable as these passages sound, they must yet not be pressed too far. What is meant is that as the highest virtue is charity (in the Talmud the higher charity (גמילות חסדים) is distinguished from mere alms-giving and appraised above it), so is charity the highest expression and proof of genuine repentance. The idea of bartering alms in exchange for pardon was certainly not intended. Sirach says once :

To depart from wickedness is that which pleases God,
To give up unrighteousness is atonement. (xxxii. 3.)

Now this is simple and wholesome doctrine, against which no objection can be raised. But to give alms, or better to do charity, is for the later Hebrew Sages the noblest element in goodness, and when it is said that "alms will make an atonement for sin," the part is substituted for the whole, the concrete instance for the abstract quality. The prophetic denunciations in Sirach of the sacrifices of the wicked (xxxi. 19, vii. 9, etc.) show that too mechanical an interpretation of the alms-giving passages is manifestly unfair.

(d.) In one important respect Sirach is clearly on a lower level than Proverbs. It is now not merely the Christian sentiment which is justly outraged by passages such as :—Nine men I pronounce happy. . . .

He that lives to see the fall of his enemies. (xxv. 7.)
Give to the pious,
But help not the sinner,
For God too hates the sinner,
And will repay vengeance to the wicked.

The sinner is synonymous with the enemy (xii. 14-16), and this identification is in so far a palliation of Sirach's mercilessness, as by the sinner he frequently implies, like the Psalmists, heathen foes or Jewish apostates. Yet if Sirach here accentuates the great religious failing of the Psalmists; from which the Sages of Proverbs through their lack of (or superiority to?) national feeling, were comparatively free, he outdoes the famous forgiveness distichs in Proverbs in the following noble passage, the finest in his book :—

He who takes revenge shall find vengeance from God,
And his sins he will keep in remembrance.
Forgive thy neighbour the wrong he has done to thee,
So shall thy sins be forgiven when thou prayest.
One man retains hatred against another,
Does he ask pardon from God?
To a man, who is like himself, he shows no pity;
Does he ask pardon for his own sins?

If he, who is but flesh, keeps back his hatred,
 Who will make atonement for his sins !
 Remember thy end, and cease to hate,
 Remember corruption and death, and keep the commandments ;
 Remember the commandments, and bear no malice against thy neighbour,
 Remember the covenant with the highest, and neglect the wrong.
 (xxviii. 1-7.)

When Sirach wrote, Palestine had become the battle-field between the Ptolemies and the Seleucidae, and the Jews had suffered many a calamity. In such times religious particularism was immediately aroused, and the sinner identified with the author of the wrong. It was only very seldom that the universalism inherent in monotheism could triumph over the intense and burning hatred of the foreign oppressor. Sirach is in this respect no better than the Psalmists, and one whole chapter of his book (xxxiii.) is devoted to a long prayer for the restoration of Israel's independence and for vengeance upon its foes.

Theoretically the author knows better. Theoretically he can say :

The mercy of man extends but to his neighbour ;
 The mercy of God to all mankind. (xviii. 12.)

But this is an isolated passage.

Particularism in 180 B.C. is necessarily associated with a deep devotion to the Law. Here it is where Sirach most sharply differs from Proverbs. And the Law, which he identifies with wisdom (xxiv. 22) is always the written Law enshrined in the Pentateuch. There are several points in his praise of the Law which are worthy of notice.

(a.) The sacrificial portion of the Law is comparatively of small importance to him. It has quite lost its original meaning. It is true that Aaron receives a longer meed of praise than Moses, and that the Temple service is described with enthusiasm, and had obviously made a considerable impression upon his mind ; it is also true that in one passage he urges that honour should be paid to God's ministers, the priests, and their due portions faithfully paid to them, but his real feeling is expressed in the following distichs :—

He that keeps the Law brings many offerings ;
 He who fulfils the commandments sacrifices peace offerings.
 He who shows gratitude offers fine flour ;
 He who is charitable sacrifices a thank offering (xxxii. 1, 2).

Sacrifices are, indeed, to be brought, but not for any end of their own. They are to be brought, as so many other commandments are to be obeyed, of which the *raison d'être* is quite hidden from the believer, merely because they happen to be enjoined in the Law.

All this is to be done because of the commandment : πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα χάριν ἐντολῆς (xxxii. 5). Here we have already the key note of Rabbinism and of orthodox Judaism to this day ; the Law for its own sake, the Law as the will of God. What the motive of the command may be is of no importance ; if it has no apparent object, it is none the less God's will, and the doing of it is not only the Jew's bounden duty, but also his most precious privilege. If men have parodied the orthodoxy of the Church in the "*credo quia absurdum*," with an "*ago quia absurdum*" one could parody the orthodoxy of the Synagogue.

(b.) In Sirach we begin to notice also the dangerous exclusiveness of the Rabbinic ideal. It is true that in his depreciation of trades he was not followed by the Rabbis (xxvi. 20, xxxviii. 24-34). But its parallel is their disparagement of the *האָרץ עַם* who can neither be God-fearing or

wise. There is also a curious parallel between the ideal of Sirach and the Rabbis, and that of Aristotle and some of the Greek philosophers. Though the innate practicalness and work-a-day morality of the Jewish character was continually combating the pre-eminence of knowledge, the Rabbinic ideal, like Aristotle's, did not consist so much in doing as in knowing. It is a *θεωρία*, and the *θεωρία* is its own reward. It is a *θεωρία* too which brings men near to the divine; even the famous *νόσις νοήσεως* of the Metaphysics is paralleled by the grotesque idea of the Rabbis that God's main occupation is the study of the Law. To the Greek philosopher, a prime requisite for the attainment of this ideal is the necessary amount of leisure (*σχολή*), and so we find in Sirach:—

The wisdom of a Scribe comes by opportunity of leisure, and he that has little business shall become wise (*σοφία γραμματέως ἐν εὐκαιρίᾳ σχολῆς, καὶ ὁ ἐλασσούμενος πράξει αὐτοῦ σοφισθήσεται, xxxviii. 24*).

(c.) The two results of the faithful study and practice of the Law are wisdom and a good life. Sirach never notices any of the externalities of the Law, except offerings and first fruits, and these, as we have seen, receive their value only because they happen to find a place there. Thus the moral elements of the Law, benevolence, chastity, etc., have their independent value apart from forming a portion of the code book. The forms and ceremonies are only valuable because in some mysterious manner they embody the wisdom of God, and are given in his grace as the prerogative of Israel. This is again the true Rabbinic point of view.

(d.) Lastly, Sirach, like the author of Psalm cxix., knows nothing, any more than the true disciples of the Rabbis know anything, of the theory which turns the Law into a perpetual bondage. To the foolish and intractable (*ἀκάρδιος καὶ ἀπαίδευτος*) the ways of wisdom (= the Law) may seem rough and its yoke heavy. But he who desires to learn will find but little trouble, and quickly will he enjoy the fruits of his study. Thus the Sage urges his hearers:

Put thy feet in wisdom's fetters,
And thy neck into her chain;
Draw near to her with all thy heart,
And keep her ways with all thy power;
For at the last thou wilt find her rest,
And she will be turned for thee into joy.
Her fetter will become thy strong defence,
Her chains a robe of glory;
Thou wilt put her on as a robe of honour,
And set her upon thee as a crown of joy. (xvi. 25-31.)

This is the true theory of Judaism about the Law. Outsiders can but see the fetters and the chain; only to the initiated are they transfigured into the robe of glory and the crown of joy.

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